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Vice-President, California Faculty Association
Joint Committee to Review the Master Plan for Higher Education
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Assemblymember Ruskin, Senator Negrete-McLeod, and members of the committee, my name is Kim Geron, and I am Vice-President of the California Faculty Association. CFA represents the 23,000 faculty, counselors, coaches and librarians who teach at the California State University system.

You've already heard about the crisis we are facing: Tens of thousands of our state's eligible students are being denied access to a CSU education. Countless numbers of classes are being eliminated. Thousands of faculty have, or will be, dismissed – many are young faculty who will no longer be in the pipeline to replace aging professors.

Unfortunately, we are also witnessing proposals within the CSU that we believe are using our state's economic climate as an opportunity to permanently alter the CSU's mission and move our public institutions closer to a business model that focuses on profits instead of opportunities.

And this is occurring as student fees continue to escalate and public accountability is being ignored.

In short, CFA believes the CSU system is standing at an historical precipice.

And as our state's economy continues to struggle in its recovery, we are choking off a key public institution that is essential if the state is to regain its economic strength.

Now that I've covered the obvious, I will try to respond to your staff's request that CFA suggest how the next four hearings be focused regarding Eligibility and Access; Affordability and Financing; Accountability; Coordination and Efficiency:

Eligibility and Access

CFA suggests this committee not allow the state's economic difficulties to dictate whether we abandon the state's historical commitment to access, or to change eligibility requirements that exclude qualified students.

Under our current climate, as the CSU continues to receive record numbers of eligible applicants we are denying access to record numbers of students.

If the reason for limiting access is an economic one, then we believe this committee needs to engage in a public, comprehensive and active dialogue with the state's business community in determining whether they are willing to make the financial commitment needed to ensure the state has an educated and capable workforce.

Affordability and Financing

Affordability has become an issue not only for low-income families, but for middle-class families as well. Even for the students who are fortunate enough to be admitted, these students are increasingly faced with depleted academic programs and support services.

We believe this committee needs to be honest in its assessment of what is defined as "affordable." Simply comparing student fee levels of other states – and using such comparisons to justify further fee increases – ignores California's higher cost-of-living for housing, food and transportation. "Affordability" must incorporate the total costs to attend college in California and allow for a more accurate and honest comparison with other states.

To finance our universities, we believe other funding sources within the university should be made more transparent. Specifically funds held by foundations and auxiliaries funded by private donations and campus fees paid by students. Why should these budgets be hidden from public scrutiny and oversight? CFA is reintroducing Senate Bill 218 next year to provide such accountability and transparency, and we are hopeful the legislature will continue its almost unanimous support for this proposal.

CFA has also proposed another financing option: Assembly Bill 656, being carried by Assemblymember Torrico, would institute a new tax on companies that extract gas with the proceeds used to fund public higher education. We believe this is a way of using "public resources" for a "public benefit" that our entire economy and society would benefit from. Options need to be explored to ensure our colleges and universities have a reliable and stable source of funding. Again, embarking on a meaningful dialogue with the business community would help achieve this goal.

Accountability

CFA believes this needs to be an integral part of your deliberations, especially in regards to the CSU. And we believe that “accountability” must be assessed not only for “outcome measures” but “input measures” as well.

For instance, while accounting for graduate and completion rates is important, shouldn't the state also account for how state tax revenue and student fees are being spent? How does the state assess the successfulness of an institution if it is unable to determine how state funding is being used? For instance, “What is the balance between instructional, student service and administrative expenditures, and how does this balance affect the success of our students?”

This type of accountability is required of K-12 schools and community colleges, but has been neglected when discussing funding for the CSU. We believe this accountability distinction needs to change if we are to assure the public that tax dollars and student fees are being spent in an appropriate and responsible manner with on-going state oversight and transparency.

Placing accountability solely on faculty and students – or only on the outcome of “student performance” – ignores how funding decisions and priorities made by the CSU administration can adversely impact a student's ability to academically succeed.

Coordination and Efficiency

As part of your deliberations on accountability measures, we believe an emphasis should be placed in identifying what an efficient and appropriate level of administrative oversight is needed to conduct CSU operations. Are there ways that administrative functions could be incorporated to prevent duplication or to improve coordination not only among CSU campuses but between the CSU and Legislature? Such questions will determine whether there are less costly and bureaucratic alternatives that would enhance the ability of the CSU to educate our state's students.

Finally, I would like to offer CFA's services in assisting the committee as you continue your deliberations. We believe we have arrived at an important and historical crossroad. It is our hope that any proposals you consider will ensure greater access and educational opportunities for our students, while protecting the educational mission of the CSU.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.